



Citation for published version:

Sanchez, HS 2012, 'Research at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, UK', *Language Teaching*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 399-400. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000092>

DOI:

[10.1017/S0261444812000092](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000092)

Publication date:

2012

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

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Research in Progress

Lang. Teach. (2012), 45.3, 399–400 © Cambridge University Press 2012

doi:10.1017/S0261444812000092

Research at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, UK

Established in 1983, the Centre for Applied Linguistics (CAL) at the University of Warwick is committed to a wide range of teaching, research and consultancy activities which focus on language use, language analysis, language learning and language teaching. It is also engaged in the development of multimedia, teaching and research materials and in a number of joint projects with national and international institutions. Its activities are supported by a variety of resources: staff and student expertise, facilities, equipment and materials including collections such as the *British Academic Spoken English (BASE)* and the *British Academic Written English (BAWE)* and the *Warwick ELT Archive*.

Research at CAL is devoted to the study of language-related issues in relation to professional practice. It clusters around three main fields of specialist expertise: English language learning, teaching and assessment (ELLTA); professional and academic discourse (PAD); and working and communicating across cultures (WACC).

ELLTA members pursue a multidisciplinary approach and investigate language learning, teaching and assessment processes embedded in particular contexts of practice. Their current areas of interest include appropriate pedagogy, teacher education and development, motivation, learner autonomy, language assessment, English for young learners, and materials evaluation and design.

PAD members examine text and discourse in a range of professional and academic social contexts through a variety of approaches to analysis such as computerised corpus-based analysis, genre analysis and conversation analysis. The scope of their linguistic research also extends to language teaching, as some projects involve, for instance, the analysis of texts produced for different contexts of language teaching and learning, and the investigation of classroom teacher and learner talk.

WACC members support interdisciplinary research and a multidisciplinary perspective on the study of issues associated with working and communicating across cultures. Their research interests concern comparisons of language use in different cultures and languages; the impact of cultural factors on communicative interaction in a variety of social, educational and professional contexts; intercultural effectiveness; issues related to culture, identity and adaptation; and cultural conceptions of teaching approaches and pedagogical practices.

Three individual doctoral projects in progress, representing different stages in the research process, have been selected to illustrate some of the applied linguistic research carried out at CAL. The first is an action research project in its early stages which falls within the ELLTA strand and aims to study the integration of content and language through materials

development in the context of secondary school education in Argentina. The second project lies within the PAD strand and pedagogic research, and looks at the texts produced in Botswana by social workers and social work undergraduates in their professional and educational contexts, respectively. The last project is relevant to teacher education and involves an autoethnographic exploration of the career of a teacher trainer and principal in Sri Lanka.

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Lang. Teach. (2012), 45.3, 400–401 © Cambridge University Press 2012
doi:10.1017/S0261444812000109

Teacher-developed materials for the integration of content and language: An action research project in Argentina

This action research project explores the principles that teachers follow when developing their own materials for lessons aimed at integrating content and language in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons in state secondary education.

My adoption of an action-research stance was born out of a desire to offer secondary school students who attend private English lessons outside the school a more cognitively engaging and motivating experience inside the school. When the two teachers participating in this study and I, as a teacher-researcher, observed that our current teaching materials did not relate to our experience and contextual needs, we decided to address this issue by exploring Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) from a language-driven perspective.

The action research comprised two cycles over the 2011 school year. Following the introduction of the project (coursebook evaluation and discussion of CLIL benefits), each cycle included three stages: action (teachers developed their materials), intervention (teachers taught with those materials; lessons were audio-recorded) and evaluation (group interview with teachers and students). However, depending on our needs and level of engagement with the project, one stage might overlap with another. Each interview was orthographically transcribed and shared with the participating teachers for discussion and their approval. The results were analysed on a thematic basis using inductive coding, as categories emerged from the data themselves.

My preliminary data reveal that teachers considered CLIL simply as a practice-oriented approach which enabled students to ‘put the language to use’, as one of the teachers put it. They found CLIL useful for the development of speaking and higher-order thinking skills but not suitable for grammar teaching (in their view, ‘language teaching’ means ‘grammar teaching’). As for coursebooks, the teachers found them bland because of their trivial topics and poor activities, and – even when they were at the students’ linguistic level – neither cognitively engaging nor contextually responsive. Consequently, motivation and topic